

# What is it Like Being an Adjective in Korean?\*

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We argue that postulating A as an independent syntactic category poses questions difficult to answer without stipulations, and thus should be taken with care. First, there seems to be no consistent diagnostics that uniquely singles out A. Second, “adjectives” behave very much like verbs in various morphosyntactic contexts. In addition, the differences observed between V and “A” are not strong enough to warrant postulating A since they are not solely due to the categorial difference.

**Key words:** adjective, verb, categorial distinction, diagnostics for adjectives

## 1. Introduction

Which syntactic category a word belongs to is one of the fundamental questions a syntactic theory should address. Since the syntactic category of a word is a door to understanding its properties, we need a clear idea about the defining characteristics of syntactic categories of a language. A linguist, however, often faces the task of establishing consistent diagnostics for syntactic categories. It is often assumed, implicitly, that Korean has both A and N without serious discussions on what they really are. This paper takes a closer look at the issue, examining the tests proposed to postulate A as an independent syntactic category. We argue that we still need evidence sufficient enough to justify the postulation of A in Korean. “Adjectives” are not different enough to be categorially distinguished from V.<sup>1)</sup>

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1) An anonymous reviewer raises a possibility of collapsing verbs and adjectives, with the adjective being the syntactic category recognized by the grammar. We take the position that adjectives are collapsed under verbs for the sake of argument. We would like to

In section 2.1 and 2.2, we examine evidence for postulating A in Korean. The diagnostic tests for this syntactic category turns out to be problematic; some tests pick out a word as an adjective while others determine the word to be a verb. 2.3 shows that “adjectives” are very similar to verbs in many respects. 2.4 indicates that the observed differences between them cannot be attributed solely to the categorial difference, and that these differences reflect semantic, not categorial, properties. 2.5 introduces Baker’s syntax-based theory of syntactic categories, and applies it to Korean to see if it could shed light on this issue in Korean syntax. Section 3 summarizes the paper.

## 2. The So-called Adjectives in Korean

### 2.1. Distinguishing Adjectives from Verbs in Korean

It is often assumed that Korean has both A and V (Choi, 1937; Nam K.-S., 1968; Jung, 1994; Kim J.-N., 1998; Yoo, 1998, among others).<sup>2)</sup> A as an independent syntactic category, however, needs empirical justification as meaning is not reliable as a defining characteristics for a syntactic category. According to Grimshaw (1990), meaning does not correlate with a particular syntactic category. The noun *examination*, for example, can denote an action typically associated with a verb, a syntactic category signifying “an activity or process performed or undergone (Robins, 1989. p.39).” Despite being a noun, this word has a meaning typical of a verb.

The postulation of A in Korean, to a large extent, is based on how the morpheme *-(nu)n*<sup>3)</sup> behaves (Kim J.-N., 1998; Yoo, 1998); an “adjective” cannot combine with it while a verb can as shown in (1):

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stress, however, that this position has to be justified on independent grounds, which unfortunately is not dealt with in this research. What is important, however, is that we do not postulate two syntactic categories for predicates, but rather argue that there is no categorial distinction between two classes of words.

2) Kim Y.-H. (1998) also argues that the so-called “adjectives” are stative verbs.

3) I will be agnostic about the details of this morpheme. One could analyze it as a present tense morpheme based on the observation that it seems to be in a paradigmatic relationship with the past tense morpheme *-ess*. On the other hand, it is also possible to treat it as a morpheme that “activates” a conceptualized event denoted by a verb (Kim S.-H., 1992. p.57).

- (1) a. John-un chayk-ul ilk-nun-ta. [VERB]  
       John-TOP book-ACC read-NUN-DEC  
       "John reads a book."  
       b. John-un kunmyenha-(\*)n-ta. [ADJECTIVE]  
       John-TOP diligent-N-DEC  
       "John is diligent."

Compatibility with  $-(nu)n$  tells us the syntactic category of a word; a word combining with  $-(nu)n$  is a verb while one that cannot is an adjective.<sup>4)</sup> The next test useful in distinguishing "adjectives" is the type of a modifier a word can cooccur with. According to Suh (1996) and Yoo (1998), *maywoo* 'very' modifies "adjectives" while *cal* 'well'<sup>5)</sup> modifies verbs as in (2):

- (2) a. John-un chayk-ul cal/\*maywoo ilk-ess-ta. [VERB]  
       John-TOP book-ACC well/very BE-PST-DEC  
       "John read a book well."  
       b. John-un \*cal/maywoo kunmyenha-ess-ta. [ADJECTIVE]  
       John-TOP well/very diligent-PST-DEC  
       "John was very diligent."

The progressive aspect *-ko iss-* also seems relevant to this task; an adjective cannot occur in this construction (Yoo, 1998) as (3) shows:

- (3) a. John-un chayk-ul ilk-ko iss-ess-ta.  
       John-TOP book-ACC read-KO BE-PST-DEC  
       "John was reading a book."  
       b. \*John-un kunmyenha-ko iss-ess-ta.  
       John-TOP diligent-KO BE-PST-DEC  
       "\*John is being diligent."

These tests,<sup>6)</sup> among others, have been used in identifying adjectives.

4) An "adjective" is "negatively" defined; if a word fails to combine  $-(nu)n$ , it is an "adjective."

5) The adverb *cal* is ambiguous, meaning either 'often' or 'well.' It is the 'well' reading in a sentence like *John-un kulim-ul cal kulin-n-ta*. "John draws well." that is relevant to the discussion.

6) An anonymous reviewer suggests that these tests do not reveal the categorial information of a word, but rather have to do with aspectual properties. Note that they are often used in the literature to assess the syntactic category of a word. In addition, this paper assumes

They pick out verbs, thereby defining a class of words as adjectives.

As long as each diagnostics yields a consistent result, we should take them seriously. We should take great care, however, in postulating A as a distinct syntactic category in Korean, solely based on these tests. What they reveal is a division of predicates into two groups, and the division itself does not automatically translate into the V/A distinction. To justify this categorial distinction, we have to show that this division is due to categorial differences.

## 2.2. Problems in Diagnostics

We expect the diagnostics to be robust and systematic in characterizing the syntactic category of a word. If we assume that they are really sensitive to categorial information, we would expect them to work in tandem<sup>7)</sup> in determining the syntactic category of a word. For example, a word passing the *-(nu)n* test would pass the other tests as well, other things being equal:

- (4) a. Emeni-nun ekkey-ka cacwu kyelli-si-n-ta.  
 mother-TOP shoulder-NOM often have.pain-HON-N-DEC  
 "My mother often felt pain on her shoulder."  
 b. \*Emeni-nun ekkey-ka kyelli-si-ko iss-ta.  
 mother-TOP shoulder-NOM have.pain-HON-KO BE-DEC  
 "My mother is being felt pain on her shoulder."  
 c. Emeni-nun ekkey-ka \*cal/maywoo kyelli-si-n-ta.  
 mother-TOP shoulder-NOM well/very have.pain-HON-N-DEC  
 "My mother feels pain on her shoulder."

According to the *-(nu)n* test, *kyelli-* 'to have pain' is a verb. (4b), however,

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that they do not really constitute the defining characteristics of a syntactic category. In this light, the reviewer's suggestion furthermore undermines the implicit assumption that they have to do with categorial distinction.

7) An anonymous reviewer points out that these tests may not be taken conjunctively. For example, an uncountable noun in English cannot take the plural marker, a hallmark of a noun, showing that a word can pass some tests for a certain syntactic category while failing the others. We do not argue for the conjunctive assumption as it will become clear in the later part of this paper; we make the assumption to show that they cannot constitute defining properties of syntactic categories. If they really were defining properties, we might expect them to behave conjunctively.

shows that it behaves like an adjective with respect to the progressive. The adverbial modification (4c), furthermore, is the opposite of our expectation; as *kyelli-* is a verb, *cal*, not *maywoo*, is expected to modify it.<sup>8)</sup>

An example based on predicates like *pwumpi-* ‘to be crowded’ also points to the same problem:

- (5) a. Ku kakey-nun hangsang pwumpi-n-ta.  
       the store-TOP always be.crowded-N-DEC  
       “The store is always crowdeded.”  
       b. Ku kakey-nun hangsang pwumpi-ko iss-ta.  
       the store-TOP always be.crowded-KO be-DEC  
       “The store is always being crowded.”  
       c. Ku kakey-nun maywoo/\*cal pwumpi-n-ta.  
       the store-TOP very/well be.crowded-N-DEC  
       “The store is very crowdeded.”

(5) shows that the tests do not identify verbs with consistency; although both *-(nu)n* and the progressive determine *pwumpi-* to be a verb, the adverbial modification tells us that it is not. The same problem can be observed in (6):

- (6) a. John-un senha-n pwulywu-ey sokha-n-ta.  
       John-TOP good-ADN class-LOC belong.to-N-DEC  
       “John belongs to the class of people who are good”  
       b. \*John-un senha-n pwulywu-ey sokha-ko iss-ta.  
       John-TOP good-ADN class-LOC belong.to-KO be-DEC  
       “John is belonging to the class of people who are good.”

Predicates like *sokha-* ‘to belong to’ are not compatible with *-ko iss-* although they pass the *-(nu)n* test.

This section has shown that we still need a diagnostics that is able to define an “adjective.” The diagnostics assumed in the literature can be a good first approximation, but it cannot be the definition of what an “adjective” is. The diagnostic tests do not give consistent results as some

8) The problem with *cal* here appears to be semantic in nature as an anonymous reviewer points out. This suggests that this diagnostics may not be used in the assignment of syntactic categories.

tests fail to diagnose a word as an adjective while (the) others treat it as an “adjective.”

### 2.3. Similarities Between Korean “Adjectives” and Verbs

Postulating A implies that “adjectives”<sup>9)</sup> would behave differently from verbs in environments sensitive to categorial information. A Korean “adjective,” however, behaves quite like a verb with respect to tense markings, morphological causatives, attributive constructions, and the copula. This is surprising since languages such as English distinguish adjectives from verbs in these contexts.

It is frequently observed that a copula is obligatory with a predicative adjective unlike a verb as (7) illustrates:

- (7) a. John (\*is) hungry.
- b. John \*(is) hungers.

The adjective *hungry* requires a copula as opposed to the verb *hunger* despite the almost identical semantic imports. This contrast appears to validate the categorial distinction; a copula is tied to adjectives.

If Korean has categorially distinct adjectives, we would expect them to diverge from verbs with regard to the copula. We would find a copula with an adjective, but not with a verb.<sup>10)</sup> This expectation, however, is

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9) An anonymous reviewer points out that there are differences between verbs and “adjectives” that could implicate the categorial distinction in Korean. As the reviewer notes, most verbs are incompatible with *maywoo* which, to a large extent, modifies adjectives. It is true that this asymmetry exists between verbs and “adjectives.” However, we should keep it in our mind that we are dealing with, not syntactic/semantic tendency of words, but the definition of what they are. As such, we expect the definitions to be as rigorous as they can be, that is, without exceptions. Note, however, that the adverb *maywoo* is problematic in both ways; there are verbs (*maywoo salangha-n-ta* ‘love a lot’) that allow modification by *maywoo* and there are also some “adjectives” (*\*maywoo pi-ta* ‘very empty’) that resist the modification. Given that the crucial tests have problems, that the majority of verbs are incompatible with *maywoo* cannot constitute evidence for postulating both A and V. It seems that what the diagnostic tests do reveal is that Korean predicates are divided into groups, but do not necessarily tell us that the division reflects the categorial difference.

10) An anonymous reviewer points out that some languages such as Russian, Ancient Greek, and Latin do not have a copula even though they maintain the V/A distinction. However, we should also note that some languages have a copula, and distinguish adjectives from verbs by requiring the copula with adjectival predicates. For example, languages such as Edo and Chichewa require a copula with an adjectival predicate, but not with a verb (See Baker 2003 for discussion). The state of affairs regarding this matter calls for a detailed

(8) a. John-un kwunin-\*(i)-ess-ta. [NOUN]  
 John-TOP soldier-COP-PST-DEC  
 “John was a soldier.”  
 b. John-un celm-\*(i)-ess-ta. [ADJECTIVE]  
 John-TOP young-COP-PST-DEC  
 “John was young.”  
 c. John-un tongmwulwen-ey ka-\*(i)-ess-ta.. [VERB]  
 John-TOP zoo-LOC go-COP-PST-DEC  
 “John went to a zoo.”

cross-linguistic investigation, which is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper. We would like to point out, at this juncture, that the purported categorial distinction in Korean, if it exists, collapses in predicative contexts unlike some languages. We need to have a viable story as to why the categorial distinction disappears in this context.

- Note, however, that this move raises a host of questions. First and foremost, we must make it explicit where the null suffix occurs. This question is very important as it is directly related to the compatibility with  $\langle nu \rangle n$ . We know that every adjective-like predicate does not occur with a copula, leading to a conclusion that all of them have  $\emptyset$

According to Baker (2003), verbs differ from adjectives in terms of morphological causativization; verbs are causativized by affixing a causative affix directly to a verb (root) while adjectives deploy a different means.

- (9) a. Mwana a-ku-d-ets-a zovala. (Chichewa)  
 1.child 3sS-PRS-be.dirty<sub>V</sub>-CAUSE-FV clothes  
 "The child is making the clothes be dirty."  
 b. \*Mbidzi zi-na-kali-its-a m-kango.  
 10.zebras 10S-PAST-fierce<sub>A</sub>-CAUS-FV 3-lion  
 "The zebras made the lion fierce." (Baker, 2003. p.54)
- (10) a. John-ga Mary-o ik-ase-ta. (Japanese)  
 John-NOM Mary-ACC go-CAUSE-PAST  
 "John made Mary go."  
 b. \*Taro-ga heya-o hiro-sase-ta.  
 Taro-NOM room-ACC wide<sub>A</sub>-CAUSE-PAST  
 "Taro widened the room." (Baker, 2003. p.55)

Both Chichewa and Japanese attach the causative affixes, *its/ets* and *(s)ase*, respectively, to verbs. As the (b)-examples show, however, this means of causativization is not available to adjectives.

On the other hand, a Korean "adjective" is not different from a verb as illustrated in the following examples:

- (11) a. Tam-i noph-ess-ta.  
 fence-NOM high-PST-DEC  
 "The fence was high."  
 b. \*Tam-i noph-nun-ta.  
 fence-NOM high-NUN-DEC  
 "The fence is high."  
 c. Inpwu-tul-i tam-ul noph-hi-ess-ta.  
 worker-PL-NOM fence-ACC high-CAUSE-PST-DEC  
 "Workers make the fence be high."

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making them verbs, which in turn suggests that they must be compatible with *-(nu)n*, which is far from the truth. Unless we can restrict the distribution of this problematic phonetically null suffix, this move is just begging the question.



- (12) a. mwul-i            kkulh-ess-ta.  
           water-NOM boil-PST-DEC  
           ‘‘he water boiled.’’  
       b. mwul-i            kkulh-nun-ta.  
           water-NOM boil-NUN-DEC  
           ‘‘The water boils.’’  
       c. John-i            mwul-ul        kkulh-i-ess-ta.  
           John-NOM water-ACC boil-CAUSE-PST-DEC  
           ‘‘John boiled the water.’’

As the (b)-examples show, (11) contains an ‘‘adjective’’ while (12) contains a verb. However, both of them deploy the same morphological causative suffix.<sup>13</sup> They have essentially the same morphosyntax of causatives.<sup>14</sup>

Another parallelism between ‘‘adjectives’’ and verbs in Korean could be found in the attributive construction. In this construction, an adjective directly modifies a noun without a morphological or syntactic device mediating between them while a verb calls for an intervention of either morphology or syntax (Baker 2003: 192). For instance, *rich* modifies the noun *experience* directly, without any added structure in between as in (13):

- (13) John has [a rich experience].

Now, compare (13) with the following where the verb *enrich* is used in various morphosyntactic shapes as a modifier:

- (14) a. \*John has an enrich experience.  
       b. John has an enriched experience.  
       c. John has an experience [which has been enriched by ...].

*Enrich* cannot modify the noun directly in (14a), and thus needs the suffix *-ed* in (14b) or the relative clause in (14c).

If Korean has both A and V, we expect discrepancy in this construction. Let us see whether or not this expectation holds.

13) One could argue that the suffix used in causativizing a verb is different from the one used in causativizing an adjective. However, the differences observed in (11-12) are due to allomorphy.

14) This state of affairs contrasts with a language like Japanese. Nishiyama (1999) convincingly argues that Japanese does have adjectives as distinct from verbs; she identifies a number of clustering properties that are sufficient to postulate A alongside V.

- (15) a. Mary-nun [[alum-tap-\*(un)] yeca]-i-ta.  
 Mary-TOP beautiful-ADN woman-COP-DEC  
 "Mary is a beautiful woman."  
 b. Mary-nun [[swusul-lo alum-tap-e ci-\*(n)] yeca]-i-ta.  
 Mary-TOP surgery-BY beautiful-E become-ADN woman-COP-DEC  
 "Mary is a woman who gets beautiful by a plastic surgery."

The morpheme *-ci* in (15b) is an inchoative suffix, and thus a word containing it is a verb. The adnominal suffix *-n*, thus, makes sense and this is what we would expect of a verb in the attributive construction. Since the to-be modifier *alumtap-e-ci* (< *alumtaw-e-ci*) is a verb, the adnominal suffix comes into play, on a par with (14b). Observe, however, that the same suffix also shows up on *alum-tap*.<sup>15</sup> Note that *-tap* in (15a) is a derivational suffix creating an "adjective" (See Kim C.-S., 1996; Song, 1992). Both a verb and an "adjective" need the adnominal suffix, clearly illustrating commonalities rather than differences. It raises questions as to why this is so in the face of the fact that many languages with the V/A distinction exhibit different patterns in this context.

One may note semantic differences that exist between verbs and "adjectives" in the attributive construction. For example, (15a) describes a woman who is pretty at the present moment while (15b) implies that she got a plastic surgery in the past, resulting in the present state of becoming pretty. In other words, the "adjective" in direct modification does not seem to have the "past" implication while the verb in this context implies that the action denoted by the verb has taken place in the past. Nevertheless, it seems premature to attribute interpretive differences to the categorial difference.

- (16) a. John-i sokha-n hakhoy  
 John-NOM belong.to-ADN academic.society  
 "the academic society where John belongs."  
 b. John-un kananha-n kye chung-ey sokha-n-ta.  
 John-TOP poor-ADN class-LOC belong.to-N-DEC  
 "John belongs to the poor class."

15) Languages such as Spanish and French require pieces of morphology on adjectives in the attributive construction. These pieces, however, are independent of the issue at hand, having to do with the agreement of number, person, gender, etc.

*Sokha-* ‘to belong to’ is a verb as it is compatible with *-(nu)n*. However, we lack the past implication with it when used as a modifier in (16a). This clearly weakens the plausibility of attributing the interpretive difference to the categorial difference. Though *sokha-* ‘to belong to’ is a verb, it still lacks the “past” implication usually associated with a verb in Korean attributive constructions.

As the data presented so far illustrate, an “adjective” in Korean is not that different from a verb in many respects; an adjective is very much like a verb. The parallelism between “A” and V presents a serious challenge for those who posit A as a syntactic category distinct from V.

#### 2.4. How Different Are they?

ECM and resultatives appear to illustrate the need for A. In Korean ECM, an embedded predicate has to be A and only A seems to be able to function as a secondary predicate in the resultative construction. As Lee (1988) observes, a predicate capable of being embedded in ECM appears to be restricted to an “adjective.” A verb cannot be an embedded predicate in this construction:

- (17) a. John-un ku sonye-{**ka/lul**} yeppu-ta-ko sayngkak-ha-ess-ta.  
 John-TOP the girl-NOM/ACC pretty-DEC-C think-HA-PST-DEC  
 “John thought the girl to be pretty.”  
 b. John-un kkoch-{**i/\*ul**} phi-n-ta-ko sayngkak-ha-ess-ta.  
 John-TOP flower-NOM/ACC bloom-N-DEC-C think-HA-PST-DEC  
 “John thought the flowers were blooming.”  
 c. John-un ku sonye-{**ka/\*lul**} ket-nun-ta-ko sayngkak-ha-ess-ta.  
 John-TOP the girl-NOM/ACC walk-NUN-DEC-C think-HA-PST-DEC  
 “John thought that the girl was walking.”

As (17b) and (17c) illustrate, embedded subjects can not take ACC when embedded predicates are verbs. On the other hand, with an “adjective,” an ECM subject can be either NOM or ACC. This asymmetry, thus, appears to provide a piece of evidence that justifies the postulation of A; ECM singles out A as a possible candidate for the embedded predicate.

This restriction, however, does not seem to be categorial in nature, upon the closer examination of the data. Take a look at the following:

- (18) a. Tom-un [nay-ka/\*lul cha-ka sey sikan-i philyoha-ta-ko]  
 Tom-TOP I-NOM/\*ACC car-NOM 3 hour-NOM need-DEC-C  
 sayngkakha-n-ta.  
 think-PRS-DEC  
 "Tom thinks that I need a car for three hours."
- b. Tom-un [aitul-i/lul manhun salang-i philyoha-ta-ko]  
 Tom-TOP children-NOM/ACC much love-NOM need-DEC-C  
 sayngkakha-n-ta.  
 think-PRS-DEC  
 "Tom thinks children need lots of love."

(Adapted from Wechsler and Lee, 1995)

(18) indicates that being an adjective is not sufficient enough for a predicate to an embedded predicate of the ECM construction. Although *philyoha-* 'to need' would be categorized as an adjective (*\*philyoha-n-ta*), ECM is not possible. According to Wechsler and Lee (1995), the constraint in question is semantic in nature, making reference to how predicates are interpreted. "Generally speaking, the predicate must be a relatively permanent or inherent property of the accusative NP (Wechsler and Lee, 1995. p.3)." In other words, semantic factors figure prominently in dictating which predicate can appear in this context. This observation raises a question as to whether the syntactic category really determines functionability of a predicate as the embedded predicate in this construction.

Another syntactic structure where the purported V/A distinction shows up is the resultative construction. This construction appears to exhibit an asymmetry between V and A; the secondary predicate has to be an adjective (Levin and Rappaport, 1995; Baker, 2003).

- (19) a. I beat the metal flat.  
 b. \*I beat the metal break/breaking/broken. (Baker, 2003. p.19)
- (20) a. John-un chayksang-ul kkaykkusha-key takk-ess-ta.  
 John-TOP desk-ACC clean-KEY wipe-PST-IND  
 "John wiped the desk clean."
- b. \*John-un Bill-ul ssuleci-key ttayli-ess-ta.  
 John-TOP Bill-ACC fall.down-KEY hit-PST-IND  
 "John hit Bill so that Bill fell down."

This generalization, however, does not always hold; there are some instances where a verb functions as a secondary predicate as shown in (21):

- (21) a. John-un Mary-uy ekkey-lul kyelli-key pithul-ess-ta.  
 John-TOP Mary-GEN shoulder-ACC have.pain-KEY twist-PST-DEC  
 "John twisted Mary's shoulder so that she felt pain."  
 b. John-un kwutwu-lul panccaki-key ttakk-ess-ta.  
 John-TOP shoes-ACC shine-KEY shine-PST-DEC  
 "John shined his shoes so that they shined."  
 c. John-un sinpalkkun-ul an-phwulli-key mwukk-ess-ta.  
 John-TOP shoe.string-ACC NEG-untie-KEY tie-PST-DEC  
 "John tied his shoe strings so that they would not untie."

Note, first, that the underlined predicates are compatible with *-(nu)n*:

- (22) a. Mary-uy ekkey-ka cal/maywoo kyelli-n-ta.  
 Mary-GEN shoulder-NOM well/very much have.pain-N-DEC  
 "Mary has pains on her shoulder."  
 b. John-uy kwutwu-nun hangsang ??cal/maywoo panccaki-n-ta.  
 John-GEN shoes-TOP always well/very much shine-N-DEC  
 "John's shoes always shine a lot."  
 c. John-uy kwutwukkun-un cal/??/\*maywoo anpwulli-n-ta.  
 John-GEN shoe.string-TOP well/very much NEG-loosen-N-DEC  
 "The strings of John's shoes do not loosen."

According to the diagnostics discussed in 2.1, *kyelli-* 'to have pain,' *panccaki-* 'to shine,' and *phwulli-* 'to loosen' are verbs; all of them take *-(nu)n* and two of them, (22a) and (22c), are modified by *cal*, the typical modifier of verbs. Despite being verbs, they function as secondary predicates as (21) shows. Furthermore, they denote resulting states. If we negate the underlined predicates, we get contradiction:

- (23) a. #John-un Mary-uy ekkey-lul kyelli-key pithul-ess-ciman,  
 John-TOP Mary-GEN shoulder-ACC have.pain-KEY twist-PST-BUT  
 Mary-nun ekkey-ka kyelli-ci an-ha-ess-ta.  
 Mary-TOP shoulder-NOM have.pain-CI NEG-DO-PST-DEC  
 "John twisted Mary's shoulder painful, but Mary did not have pain."

- b. #John-un kwutwu-lul pancaki-key ttakk-ess-ciamn,  
 John-TOP shoes-ACC shine-KEY shine-PST-BUT  
 ku kwutwu-nun pancaki-ci an-ha-ess-ta.  
 the shoes-TOP shine-CI NEG-DO-PST-DEC  
 "John shined his shoes shined, but the shoes did not shine."
- c. #John-un sinpalkkun-ul an-phwulli-key mwukk-ess-ciman,  
 John-TOP shoe.string-ACC NEG-untie-KEY tie-PST-BUT  
 sinpalkkun-i phwulli-ess-ta.  
 shoe.strings-NOM loosen-PST-DEC  
 "John tied his shoe strings untied, but the shoe strings loosened."

The contradiction obtained by negating what the underlined predicates denote suggests that they are secondary resultative predicates, on a par with the contradiction we obtained in the example below:

- (24) #John-un chayksang-ul kkaykkuthha-key ttakk-ess-ciman,  
 John-TOP desk-ACC clean-KEY wipe-PST-BUT  
 ku chayksang-un kkaykkuthha-ci an-ha-ess-ta.  
 the desk-TOP clean-KEY-CI NEG-ha-PST-IND  
 "#John wided the desk clean, but the desk was not clean."

The discussion above indicates that some verbs can function as a secondary predicate in the resultative construction. This conclusion clearly weakens the plausibility of assuming that resultatives are possible only with adjectives. As a result, one potential piece of evidence that could justify the postulation of A is severely weakened.<sup>16)</sup>

We have seen that the ECM construction and the resultative construction fail to single out A. Though limited, some verbs can function as an embedded predicate in the ECM construction and a secondary predicate in the resultative construction. The crucial point is, thus, that even with the V/A distinction in place, there are examples that would resist being accounted for without additional assumptions.

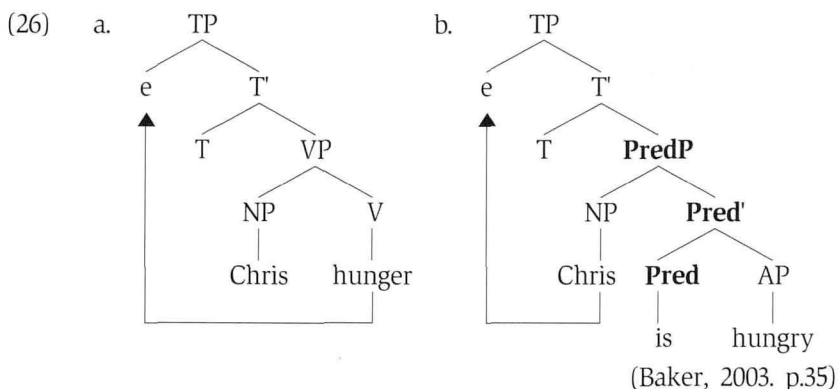
16) Of course, we need to account for why "adjectives" are more likely to appear in the resultative. As an investigation into this matter is beyond the scope of this paper, we will just mention that an explanation in terms of the syntactic category would not work in the face of the counterexamples.

## 2.5. Korean “Adjectives”: Unaccusative or Unergative?

Noting the problems associated with diagnostic tests (see 2.2 for discussion), Baker (2003) argues for a theory of syntactic categories based on syntactic configurations. He defines a verb as in (25):

(25) X is a verb if and only if X is a lexical category and X has a specifier.

Only V projects a specifier where one of its arguments, THEME, is licensed, and this is the defining characteristics of a verb. On the other hand, A cannot host a specifier position.<sup>17)</sup> This difference is indicated by the presence of PredP in AP, but not in VP, as in (26):



PredP in (26b) has to do with  $\theta$ -roles. According to Baker, AGENT and THEME can be licensed only in a specifier. Hosting a specifier within its projection, V satisfies this requirement. On the other hand, A cannot do so due to the absence of a specifier within its projection. The functional projection PredP, however, provides a specifier where the argument of an adjective can be licensed. As a consequence, the verb *hunger* in (26a) licenses *Chris* in its specifier while the adjective *hungry* in (26b), despite

17) He argues that A is neither a verb nor a noun whose defining characteristics is the referential index; an adjective is a “default” category that lacks any of these positive characteristics. A is a category that does not have any particular formal requirements imposed on it unlike V and N. In other words, A is used only when there is no danger of violating formal requirements specific to either N or V. This aspect of the theory might suggest that A may not be a universal syntactic category.

expressing more or less the same meaning as *hunger*, licenses *Chris*, not within its projection, but in [SPEC, PredP].<sup>18)</sup>

Note that this move claims that a verb and an adjective, even with similar meanings, have different syntactic/thematic properties. A verb has its THEME licensed within its projection while THEME of an adjective can be licensed only in [SPEC, PredP], external to AP. That is, an adjective is unergative while a verb (with a comparable meaning) is unaccusative<sup>19)</sup> as illustrated in (27):

- (27) a. The theme argument of a verb is an internal argument.  
 b. The theme argument of an adjective or noun is an external argument. (Baker, 2003. p.65)

Baker's theory of syntactic categories makes clear predictions with regard to the issue of A as a distinct syntactic category in Korean. Given the structural and thematic differences shown in (26), we expect a Korean "adjective" to behave as an unergative if exists in Korean. On the other hand, if Korean does not categorially distinguish A from V, we expect it to be unaccusative. In what follows, we review the unaccusativity of what would be categorized as A, and show that "adjectives" are unaccusatives, rather than unergatives. See Kim Y.-J. (1990), Ko (1994), and Yoo (1998), among others, for discussion on unaccusativity in Korean.

One of the unaccusative diagnostics is the case-marker alternation in the long-form negation<sup>20)</sup> (Yoo, 1998). Examine the following:

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18) This assumption has an advantage of coming to terms with the obligatory presence of a copula in A and N, the two syntactic categories that cannot generate a specifier position within their projection. When they are used as a predicate, that is, selecting an argument, they need Pred to provide the otherwise unavailable specifier position.

19) The unaccusativity assumed in this paper depends on whether or not an argument is external or internal to the projection of the head. A predicate with an argument generated external to its projection is unergative. Note that the definition given here is independent of the number of internal arguments as it cares only about the presence/absence of an external argument.

20) An anonymous reviewer suggests that the case-alternation observed in this construction may be due to agentivity of predicates, and thus is independent of the syntactic categories. This assumption, however, seems unable to account for why ACC shows up with a non-agentive predicate. Recall that agentivity is associated with ACC; an agentive predicate licences ACC while a non-agentive predicate cannot (cf. Burzio's Generalization). If agentivity is what is responsible for the case-alternation, we would expect the negated complement to take ACC if the predicate is agentive. However, it is a non-agentive predicate, not an agentive-predicate that allows ACC.



- (28) a. (\*ilpwule)      kkoch-i      phi-ess-ta.  
           (on purpose) flower-NOM    bloom-PST-DEC  
           “Flowers bloomed.”
- b. kkoch-i      phi-ci-{ka/lul}      an-ha-ess-ta.  
           flower-NOM    bloom-CI-NOM/ACC    NEG-do-PST-DEC  
           “Flowers did not bloom.”
- (29) a. (ilpwule)      John-un      ku os-ul      sa-ess-ta.  
           (on purpose) John-TOP    the cloth-ACC    buy-PST-DEC  
           “John bought the cloth (on purpose).”
- b. John-un      ku os-ul      sa-ci-{\*ka/lul}      an-ha-ess-ta.  
           John-TOP    the cloth-ACC    buy-CI-ACC/NOM    NEG-HA-PST-DEC  
           “John did not buy the clothes.”

*Phi-* ‘to bloom’ in (28) is unaccusative; its incompatibility with the agentive adverb *ilpwule* ‘on purpose’ shows that it is not agentive, and hence very much likely to be unaccusative. As (28b) illustrates, both *-ka* and *-lul* are possible on the negated complement. On the other hand, *sa-* ‘to buy’ in (29) is agentive as its compatibility with *ilpwule* shows. (29b) does not allow NOM *-ka* as opposed to unaccusatives that allow both ACC and NOM on the complement of the long-form negation.<sup>21)</sup>

Korean “adjectives” allow NOM on the complement of the long-form negation, on a par with a typical unaccusative verb as shown below:

- (30) a. \*Mary-ka      maywoo      yeppu-n-ta.  
           Mary-NOM    very      pretty-N-DEC  
           “Mary is very pretty.”
- b. Mary-ka      maywoo      yeppu-ci-{ka/lul}      an-ha-ess-ta.  
           Mary-NOM    very      pretty-CI-NOM/ACC    NEG-HA-PST-DEC  
           “Mary was not very pretty.”

21) An anonymous reviewer suggests that an “adjective,” unlike a verb, just allows NOM in addition to ACC in the long-form negation. Note that it just stipulates that A allows NOM. For this line of inquiry to be fruitful, it should, first, address the question why an adjective is “special” in this regard.

- (31) a. Moon-i (palam-ey) yelli-n-ta.  
 door-NOM wind-BY open-N-DEC  
 "The door opens by the wind."  
 b. Moon-i palamey yelli-ci-{ka/lul} an-ha-ess-ta.  
 door-NOM wind-BY open-CI-NOM/ACC NEG-HA-PST-DEC  
 "The door does not open by the wind."

Look at (31). *Yelli-* 'to open' is compatible with *-(nu)n*, and hence a verb. As expected, the complement in the long-form negation can be NOM. *Yeppu-* 'to be pretty' in (30b) also allows NOM although it would be an "adjective" as the incompatibility with *-(nu)n* indicates. Thus, a purported adjective is unaccusative, contrary to Baker's (2003) prediction.

The multiple nominative construction also seems relevant for determining unaccusativity. The multiple nominative is possible only if the predicate is unaccusative as illustrated in (32)-(33):

- (32) a. Ku yeca-uy atul-i cwuk-ess-ta. [unaccusative]  
 the woman-GEN son-NOM die-PST-DEC  
 "The woman's son was dead."  
 b. Ku yeca-ka atul-i cwuk-ess-ta.  
 the woman-NOM son-NOM die-PST-DEC  
 "The woman's son was dead."  
 (33)<sup>22</sup> a. John-uy tongsayng-i keli-eyse talli-ess-ta. [unergative]  
 John-GEN brother-NOM street-LOC run-PST-DEC  
 "John's brother ran on the street."

22) An anonymous reviewer points out that the following example could be problematic:

- (i). John-i tongsayng-i cal talli-n-ta.  
 John-NOM brother-NOM well run-N-IND  
 "John's brother runs well."

As *talli-* 'to run' is usually unergative, (i) illustrates that the multiple nominative construction is questionable as an indicator of unaccusativity. However, as Kim Y.-J. (1990) notes, Korean "unergatives" are not always unergative; they sometimes function as unaccusatives. For example, in the sentence *Kich-ka cal talli-n-ta* 'The train runs well,' *talli-* is not unergative, but unaccusative. Since the subject *kicha* 'a train' is inanimate, we can not ascribe agency to it. In fact, with an agentive adverb like *ilpwule* 'on purpose' in (i), the sentence becomes bad:

- (ii) ??/\*John-i tongsayng-i ilpwule talli-n-ta.  
 John-NOM brother-NOM on purpose run-N-IND  
 "John's brother runs on purpose."

- b. \*John-i        tongsayng-i        keli-eyse        talli-ess-ta.  
 John-NOM    brother-NOM    street-LOC    run-PST-DEC  
 “John’s brother ran on the street.”

(Adapted from Yoo, 1998. p. 355)

If A is different from V, we would expect it to pattern with (33). However, the prediction is not borne out. An “adjective” behaves as if it is unaccusative, allowing the multiple nominative construction as shown in (34b):

- (34) a. Ku yeca-uy        nwun-i        yeppu-(\*n)-ta.  
           the woman-GEN    eyes-NOM    pretty-DEC  
           “The woman’s eyes are pretty.”  
       b. Ku yeca-ka        nwun-i        yeppu-ta.  
           the woman-NOM    eyes-NOM    pretty-DEC  
           “The woman’s eyes are pretty.”

As the incompatibility with  $-(nu)n$  indicates, *yeppu-* ‘to be pretty’ is an “adjective.” Nevertheless, it allows the multiple nominative.

We have observed that “adjectives” in Korean, those predicates incompatible with  $-(nu)n$  pattern on a par with unaccusative verbs, as shown below:

(35) Unaccusative Diagnostics and Adjectives in Korean

Diagnostics	“Adjectives”	Unaccusatives	Unergatives
NOM/ACC alternation	✓	✓	×
Multiple nominative	✓	✓	×

This is a bit surprising result in light of Baker (2003). If an adjective is syntactically different from a verb in that its argument is external, i.e., [SPEC, PredP] while that of an unaccusative verb is internal, i.e., [SPEC, VP], the class of words diagnosed as an “adjective” would be unergative, contrary to what we have actually found. This result is puzzling as long as we postulate A as a distinct syntactic category. However, if Korean does not have A, this result would no longer be puzzling. They are unaccusative verbs in Korean. It is those who postulate A alongside V that is to bear the burden of accounting for the unaccusativity of “adjectives.”

### 3. Summary

Deciding how many syntactic categories a language has is one of the central tasks a linguist should deal with. Despite the importance, deciding whether a word is a verb or an adjective in Korean is based on rather shaky grounds. Neither syntactic criteria nor morphological evidence yields consistent results in determining the syntactic category of a word. We have seen that “adjectives” pattern with verbs in a number of syntactic environments. As far as the syntax of these constructions is concerned, categorially distinguishing “adjectives” from verbs does not buy us anything; it rather complicates the grammar because a theory without A can yield the same results. In this regard, it is more economical not to assume A in Korean. Furthermore, “adjectives” in Korean behave as unaccusatives, which is a surprising result under Baker’s theory of syntactic categories where adjectives are unergatives. This fact would no longer be a puzzle if Korean does not have A; what would correspond to adjectives in a language like English is an unaccusative verb in Korean, and hence the unaccusativity of the superficially adjective-like predicates in Korean.

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